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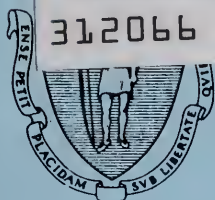
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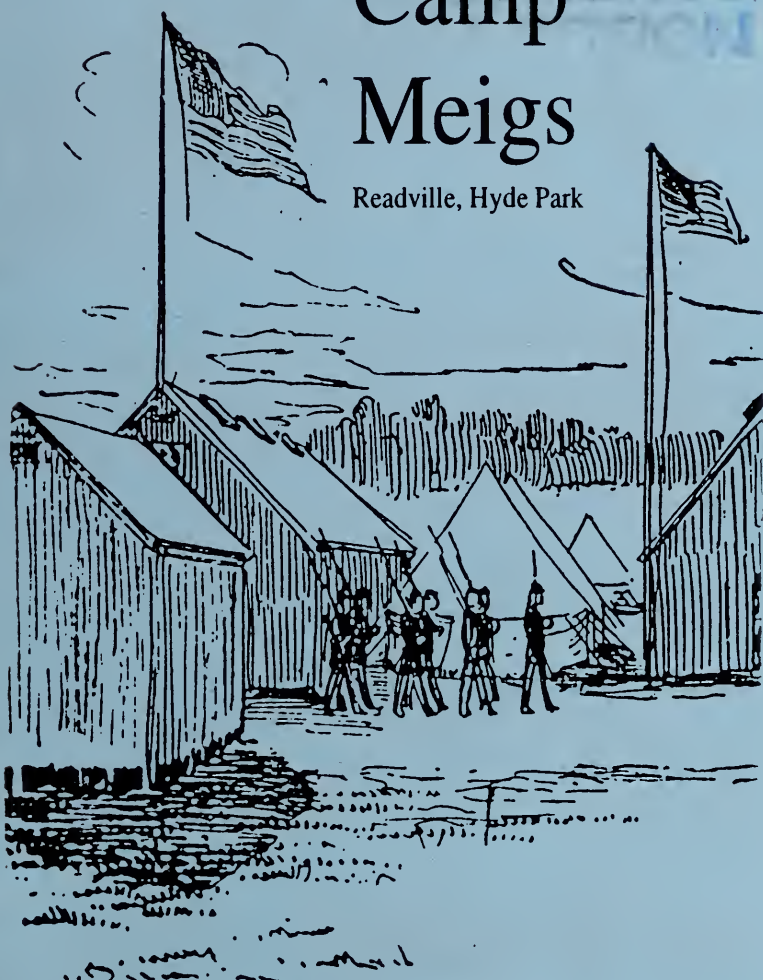
Camp Meigs and the Civil War

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AUG 06 1993

Camp Meigs

Readville, Hyde Park



THE CIVIL WAR AT READVILLE
Camp Brigham 1861 Camp Massasoit 1861
CAMP MEIGS 1862-1865
Readville General Hospital 1864-1865

Readville's Setting

Situated along the Neponset River on the present Hyde Park/Dedham line, the Readville site was a flat river terrace whose level, well-drained grounds provided a perfect drill field for military maneuvers. Its proximity to the river at Fowl Meadow and to Sprague Ponds furnished water for drinking, bathing and sanitation, while the junction of several railroads at "Sprague Plain" insured easy transport.

During prehistoric times, native peoples used Sprague Plain for camping and settlement sites. Prior to the Civil War the Plain supported agricultural pursuits, a race course and a militia drill field. By 1863, the military's 139 acre campground was defined by the Neponset flood plain on the east and south, by Milton Street (Neponset Valley Parkway) on the north, and was traversed by Sprague Street on the west.



Penell sketch by Lieut. J. M. Barnard, Co. G.

CAMP MASSASOIT, READVILLE.

Readville's Camps

During the Civil War, the Commonwealth prepared 115,000 troops for federal service at 39 training camps scattered throughout the state. In the Boston area, the MDC owns at least eight properties associated with these camps. While many of these "rendezvouses" were only transient, single regimental encampments, Readville proved Massachusetts' most enduring site, supporting three camps over time.

Camp Brigham was a tent encampment raised on Sprague Plain in July 1861 to outfit one infantry and one cavalry regiment. Also opened in July, adjacent **Camp Massasoit** was another short-lived tent encampment supporting two infantry regiments and one light artillery battery.

Camp of 45th Regt.
M.V.M.

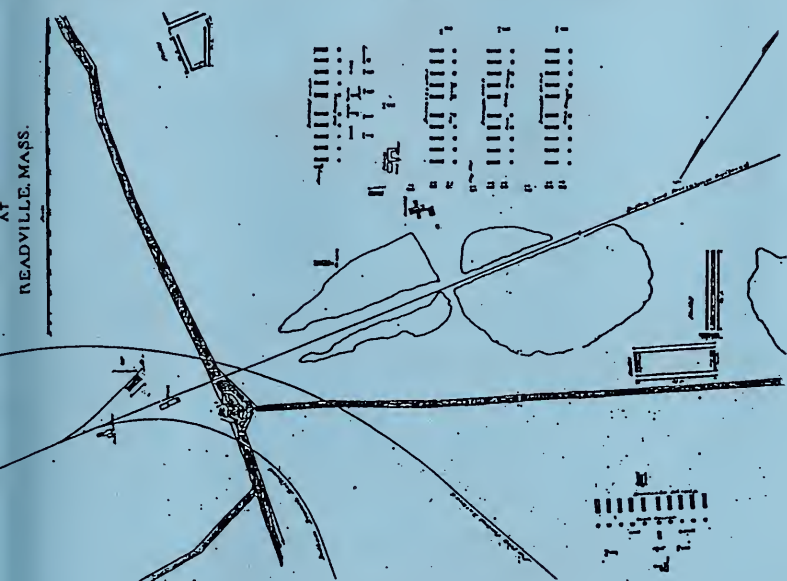


at Camp Meigs,
READVILLE,
MASS.

The camp grounds at Readville were first designated **Camp Meigs** in the autumn of 1862. Among its many graduates were Massachusetts' three black regiments, most notably the 54th MVM Infantry.

Camp Meigs

Established as one of the several barracked cantonments preparing nine-month regiments for service down South, the Readville campgrounds were first designated Camp Meigs in September 1862 in honor of the federal Quartermaster General, Montgomery Meigs. By inaugurating a program that consolidated troop training into specific camps of instruction, Camp Meigs became all but synonymous with the Readville site. The campground rapidly evolved into the Commonwealth's primary rendezvous for new regiments while concurrently readying volunteer replacements for existing units. Operating as a discharge depot throughout the war, sections of the camp were also converted into a general hospital in 1864.



At its zenith, Readville's compound was an extensive complex consisting of barracks supplemented by officers quarters, headquarters buildings, a commissary, cook houses, a sutler, several storehouses, a chapel, an armory, several hospitals, a laundry, several guardhouses, a variety of stables, many wells and several flagstaffs—in effect, the amenities of a small town.



The wooden barracks at Camp Meigs entailed a large hall quartering one company of 100 enlisted men with a separate room for the sergeants responsible for instructing and disciplining the troops. A row of 10 barracks flanked by officers quarters and backed by company cook houses defined the regimental street where the troops mustered for inspection and drill.

Camp Life at Readville

After disembarking at Readville's train depot, recruits were assigned to a company and "schooled" in their new duties. Service at Camp Meigs ranged from a few days to many months; reflected the length of enlistment and prior experience; and included the rudiments of military life supplemented by specialized infantry, cavalry or artillery drills. Civil War military training emphasized linear tactics and constant drill, repetition being the order of the day.

General Order No. 71 decreed that a recruit's schedule had never a dull moment:



Union Bayonet. No. 229.

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Reveille and roll-call | 5:00 a.m. |
| 2. First sergeant's call | 5:30 a.m. |
| 3. Breakfast. | 6:30 a.m. |
| 4. Surgeon's call | 7:30 a.m. |
| 5. Guard-mounting | 8:00 a.m. |
| 6. Drills | 9:00 a.m. to noon |
| 7. Dinner | 12:00 noon |
| 8. First sergeant's call | 1:00 p.m. |
| 9. Drills | 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. |
| 10. Dress parade | 5:00 p.m. |
| 11. Supper | 6:00 p.m. |
| 12. Retreat and roll-call | Sunset |
| 13. Tattoo | 8:30 p.m. |
| 14. Taps | 9:00 p.m. |

The men slept dormitory-style in double bunks, with their gear hung on pegs, stashed in a small footlocker or stowed in their knapsacks. The intensity of training (and lack of privacy) made for an *esprit de corps* and friendships that would be reinforced by the comradeship of active service.



Friends and family visiting the camp helped break the monotony since railroading out to Readville to watch the troops parade was one of Boston's most popular wartime excursions. Packages from home or purchases from the camp sutler supplemented the mess hall rations of fresh or salted beef or pork, bread, coffee and vegetables-in-season.

When considered to be "proficient in their training," the regiment was formally mustered from state militia service into federal army service and given its marching orders.

War Service

Upon graduating from the "school of the soldier", Readville's alumni served on the homefront, along the Canadian frontier, and in three major southern theaters.

Within the Commonwealth, Readville's graduates pulled camp duties at Gallops Island, Beach Street Barracks and at Camp Meigs itself. Garrisoning the coastal defenses of Boston, Salem, Marblehead, Salisbury Beach, Plymouth, New Bedford, and Provincetown, they also maintained the domestic peace during incidents like the 1863 Boston draft riots. Readville's Unattached Infantry Companies even guarded Confederate prisoners at Fort Warren on George's Island.



Elsewhere, the Frontier Cavalry Battalion was deployed, not out west, but on the New York-Canadian border following the 1864 Confederate raid on St. Albans,

Vermont. Farther south and behind the front, Readville's troops garrisoned seacoast forts like the 6th MVM Infantry at Fort Delaware or the fortifications defending Washington such as the 3rd MVM Heavy Artillery. They performed guard duty such as the 60th in Indianapolis or hospital duty such as the 8th at Baltimore. Finally, they occupied Confederate territory like the 47th MVM Infantry in Louisiana or guarded POWs such as the 5th MVM Cavalry at Point Lookout, Maryland. All were duties contributing to the ultimate Union victory.



Upon reaching the front, active campaigning took many guises. Whether assigned the grueling march or countermarch of a war of maneuver or the listless boredom of siege warfare, battles and skirmishes were only a moment in a soldier's life. Most time was spent preparing for conflict. Readville's alumni fought in most of the major engagements in the East, a roll call whose better known actions included:

| | | |
|------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1861 | Bull Run VA | Balls Bluff VA |
| 1862 | Bull Run VA | Yorktown VA |
| | New Berne NC | Fredricksburg VA |
| | Antietam MD | Malvern Hill VA |
| 1863 | Galveston TX | Fort Wagner SC |
| | Gettysburg PA | Chancellorville VA |
| 1864 | Red River LA | The Wilderness VA |
| | Honey Hill SC | Cold Harbor VA |
| | Petersburg VA | The Crater VA |
| 1865 | Petersburg VA | Appomatox VA |

Men also fought, and many died, at "Place Unknown."



Readville's Roster

From 1861 to 1865 the Commonwealth contributed more than 114,000 Massachusetts Volunteer Militia troops and 135 army units for service in "The Great Rebellion." Of those men roughly 30,000, assigned to 55 units, trained at Readville for civil war. By war's end Massachusetts provided the Union with a total of 146,730 men: 122,781 white soldiers, 3966 black soldiers and 19,983 sailors of both races. Death through battle, disease, accident and prisoner of war camps claimed 13,983 lives.

NOW IN CAMP AT READVILLE!

54th REGIMENT!

Readville's camps of instruction were Massachusetts' only training facility to outfit soldiers for the federal army's four major combat arms, instilling the basic duties and tactics needed to survive the specialized operations performed by those branches. Troops were recruited into a specific regiment, unattached company or battery whose enlistments varied from three months to three years. Since some units had several incarnations, the camp roster of Readville's troops records the following 55 units:

INFANTRY

Regiments

Three year: 18th, 20th, 24th, 54th, 55th, 56th, 58th, 59th

One year: 62nd

Nine month: 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 47th, 49th

Hundred day: 6th, 8th, 42nd, 60th, & possibly the 5th



Unattached Companies

One year: 18th, 24th, 26th.

Hundred day: 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd

Ninety day: 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th

HEAVY ARTILLERY

Regiments

Three year:



Unattached Companies

2nd Three year: 13th

LIGHT ARTILLERY

Batteries

Three year: 5th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 16th

Nine month: 11th



CAVALRY

Regiments Battalions Three year: 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th One year: 1st

US Army General Hospital, Readville

By June 1864, the increase in wounded soldiers prompted the Union Army to open a second major hospital in Massachusetts, commandeering the main easterly section of Camp Meigs for a United States Army General Hospital at Readville. The Readville General Hospital grew into an impressive 71 building compound of wards, quarters, kitchens, support buildings, storehouses, etc., whose staff treated more than 4000 troops for campaign-related wounds or disease. Here, the wounded were treated close to family and friends, with many a Readville graduate ironically hospitalized where they once barracked. The hospital, with its chapel, gymnasium and library was phased out at war's end, the last wards being auctioned off in January 1866.

Mustering Out

The camp's westernmost section, where the 54th MVM once quartered, was reserved for training the Commonwealth's few late war units and for mustering out those units whose enlistments had ended. Military protocol recommended that troops be mustered from federal service or at least be discharged from state service as close to their place of enlistment as possible. The summer following the war's end in April 1865 saw Camp Meigs and the Boston Harbor Camp at Gallops Island hectically processing troops. Nearly 50 MVM units were decommissioned at Camp Meigs, completing closure of the cycle from citizen to soldier back to citizen.



Readville Today

Following the war, the northern half of the hospital area east of the railroad slowly developed into a residential neighborhood, while its southern half was used first as a racecourse and later for warehousing. In 1899 the Metropolitan Park Commission (MPC) purchased the Neponset River's Fowl Meadow as part of the Metropolitan Park System. West of the tracks, the area evolved into a mixture of residences and light industry. Although a monument to Readville's campgrounds was first proposed in 1866, it was not until 1903 that the town of Hyde Park allotted a small parcel near the center of old Camp Meigs for a playground. Becoming a city of Boston park after the town's 1912 annexation, the city finally transferred the Camp Meigs playground to the Metropolitan District Commission in 1958. In 1991, a tablet was dedicated to the camp's three black regiments, while as part of the MPC's 1993 centennial celebration an historic plaque was installed on site.



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Metropolitan District Commission**

William F. Weld, Governor
A. Paul Cellucci, Lt. Governor
Trudy Coxe, Secretary, EOEA
David B. Balfour, Jr., Commissioner, MDC

*Associated with the Civil War Camps at
Readville, both the Camp Meigs Playground
and the Fowl Meadow Reservation exemplify
the Metropolitan Park System's multifold
mission to preserve natural, recreational and
historical resources.*

For more information about Camp Meigs
please call the Blue Hills Reservation at
(617) 698-1802.